

National Economic Development Board

scope. The object was to win a war. While it is true that in those five years or those war years people like Right Hon. C. D. Howe, to whom there has been reference tonight, in fact were thinking in longer range terms, and were thinking of the future, nevertheless the real political purpose of those years, as the older members of this house will recall, was to address ourselves to the problems of the war.

Then following the war there was an election with a short term problem, the problem of converting from war to peace. This problem did not permit the long range view. This problem did not permit the kind of view that Europe has been able to take with respect to the Marshall plan where Europe and the E.E.C. and even the outer six countries have been able to plot, to think out and develop ideas that would take many years, perhaps decades, to fulfil.

Then, following that period, we went into a period which was creative in so far as social security in this country was concerned. We were trying to attain redistribution of income in a more equitable and favourable way for various classes of people, the old and the young. Much of our social security was given at a time—I am just illustrating this point—when we can honestly say the Liberals were not thinking in long terms during that 22-year period. They were thinking only about the problems that were foreseeable in the immediate years before them then. Now, this is the big difference—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Matheson: There is a bit of laughter in this house, particularly from the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt). I would suggest, however, that this government has come to the point in its thinking that they are thinking about five months or perhaps five weeks ahead. I am thinking of the things they have done in the field of economics. I cite, for example, this "snafu" they got themselves into in connection with the devaluation. It was not one of choice.

Mr. Nesbitt: You do not approve of it?

Mr. Matheson: Unless we were grossly deceived in this country.

An hon. Member: We were.

Mr. Matheson: Perhaps we were. On this side, we had the feeling that we were misled deliberately, misled by the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) and the then minister of finance (Mr. Fleming) in the matter of our exchange reserves.

Mr. Nesbitt: Tell us about Bob Winter's speech in Halifax.

[Mr. Matheson.]

Mr. Matheson: I am saying that the feeling is growing in this country, and we believe this, that this country has been governed in the last few months and years on a purely ad hoc basis. In other words, when a problem arises we face that particular problem but we are not prepared to think more broadly and deeply, in more substantive terms.

This is one of the reasons that the chairman of the Gordon commission, in 1956, came to the conclusion that the time had arrived when Canada had to do the sort of thing that was being done in western Europe, Germany, France, the Benelux countries and Italy. We had to start thinking in longer terms. For example, we have witnessed the great developments that have been occurring in Latin America and the resultant change in trade patterns. We are not foolish enough to suggest there have not been new problems for this administration. There have been startlingly new problems. However, this administration has acted as though there has been no change at all. There has been very little flexibility.

For instance, five or six years after the recommendations were made and earnestly put forward, we find Bill No. C-87 before us which, with its tenuous terms, seems to set up a national economic development board. We just wonder how serious this government really is about planning the growth and development of Canada. I recall a few months ago attending a meeting of the bureau of statistics, I think it was, at which the guest was an economist from Washington who had been of great assistance to the Kennedy administration. He was speaking about growth. It was interesting. This meeting was under the auspices of a committee, the chairman of which was John Deutsch. It was interesting. I sat there as an outsider and heard questions put forward by economists to this expert. The real problem was this: what happens in a country if the real problems are not faced at all, ever?

Now, they have got to be faced. I think we have to be worried to some extent about the danger of trying to pass over to a committee, a council or a board, the responsibilities of the cabinet. Under our constitutional system, we cannot create something new that is neither a cabinet nor a civil service and say, this new board is going to be responsible for our growth. It has been indicated that this government has established a plethora of boards and agencies having closely related functions. The danger is that some of them might attach to ministries, some of them may simply be a basis, for instance, for the Minister of Finance to shore himself up against his